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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4021
INFO RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA PRIORITY 9350
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD PRIORITY 6246
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU PRIORITY 4288
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 3114
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 9843
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RUEHSM/AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM PRIORITY 0313
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 2285
RUEHCI/AMCONSUL CALCUTTA PRIORITY 0224
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI PRIORITY 6795
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI PRIORITY 4664
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 1283
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E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/10/2016

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SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: FOREIGN MINISTER ASSURES NO RETURN TO
FULL-SCALE WAR IN RESPONSE TO DEMARCHE

REF: STATE 130879

Classified By: CDA JAMES R. MOORE FOR REASONS 1.4(b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Charge' delivered reftel demarche to Foreign Minister Samaraweera and Foreign Secretary Palihakkara August ¶10. Samaraweera said current military action would "not become a full-scale war." He said the government remained "committed to a negotiated settlement," but needed help getting the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) back to the table. End summary.

¶2. (C) Charge' delivered reftel demarche to Foreign Minister Mangala Samaraweera and Foreign Secretary Palihakkara August 10, emphasizing the need to de-escalate military action and focus on a peaceful solution to the ethnic conflict. FM Samaraweera responded with appreciation for US interest and continued engagement in the peace process. Samaraweera said that Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) bombings and assassinations in the last several months were designed to draw violent backlash from the Sinhalese majority and thereby bolster LTTE claims that Tamil civilians are under duress. Samaraweera said his government's responses, including air strikes on Tiger territory following a suicide bombing targeting Sri Lankan army commander Fonseka, were defensive and proportionate. Samaraweera said the government had shown great restraint in the face of repeated provocations, resorting to military ground action only in response to the LTTE's capture of a civilian water source.

¶3. (C) Palihakkara emphasized that in cutting off civilians' access to water, the LTTE was attempting to undermine the government. He added that the LTTE was using the water issue as a diversion so it could make inroads into Muttur and Trincomalee. Palihakkara reported that in the fighting August 10, 6-7 soldiers were killed and approximately 40 injured.

¶4. (C) Speaking about the current situation, Samaraweera said, "We sincerely believe-- I sincerely believe-- we cannot afford a war. For the government, war is the last option... The government can't act like a terrorist organization." He said the government is "desperate" to get the Tigers back to

the negotiating table and asked for continued international pressure on the LTTE. He reiterated that the current military engagement was "not an offensive," adding, "we remain committed to a negotiated settlement."

¶15. (C) Responding to the demarche points on human rights, Samaraweera expressed concern about the local employees of a French NGO who were killed in the east. He noted Minister of Human Rights Samarasinghe was working with the Australians to bring in investigators to assist with the case. He also said "back-channel contacts" indicated that much of the Tamil population was "fed up" with the LTTE.

¶16. (C) Samaraweera asserted, "There are factions within the government who seek a military solution, but not the President or the Foreign Ministry." He later said, "I can assure you we won't let this slide into full-scale military confrontation... Frankly, between us, I think that's unwinnable..." The meeting closed with Samaraweera and Palihakkara promising to convey the demarche points, and specifically our message on lowering the heat militarily and making a good faith effort to return to negotiations, to President Rajapaksa.

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